



David Lynch on His First Retrospective of Original Artwork

By Phoebe Hoban

Although he's best-known for his middle-America-meets-the-macabre movies, David Lynch started out as a painter and has not put down his brushes in 40-something years. Not surprisingly, the director known for his darkly visceral vision creates canvases that are anything but pretty pictures.

In fact, it was a single picture of a green garden — done at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in the mid-60s, where Lynch studied for about a year — that launched the artist into his film career. Looking at his own painting, Lynch suddenly sensed a wind blowing through the plants. This epiphany resulted in his first film in 1967, a one-minute animation called "Six Men Getting Sick," projected as a continuous loop onto a plaster screen sculpted with bas reliefs. The resulting scene was replete with stomachs filling with liquid, flames erupting and six heads regurgitating. "I started out being a painter and the film came out of wanting to make a picture move," Lynch explains, "so I always say the same rules of painting apply to a lot of cinema, and you could say that films are moving paintings that tell a story with sound."



"All I want for Christmas is My Two Front Teeth," 2012.
Courtesy of the artist and Kayne Griffin Corcoran, Los Angeles

From then on, Lynch has brought forth some of the most original images in cinematic history, from the mutant baby in "Eraserhead" to the grotesque but poignant figure of the Elephant Man to the unforgettable image of Dennis Hopper gasping through his oxygen mask in "Blue Velvet." And who could forget the rotting, ant-covered ear found in a pristine field by the film's naive protagonist, Jeffrey — played by Kyle MacLachlan, who later starred in Lynch's game-changing television series, "Twin Peaks"?

Like that decaying ear, Lynch's paintings are a vivid portal into his unique imagination. Now, his first retrospective in the United States, made up of some 90 paintings and drawings, is opening at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts this Saturday. In the above slideshow, Lynch spoke to T about the inspiration for some of his works on view.

"David Lynch: the Unified Field" is on view Sept. 13 through Jan. 11 at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Historic Landmark Building, 118 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, pafa.org.